

Brittany Franklin:

If the leader is willing to get their hands dirty at any point in their career, no matter what your title is, no matter what powerful people you just went to dinner with last night, if you can't get up the next day and be there to support your team and to make sure that whatever balls are being dropped, how can we find the solution and let's get it done versus sitting back and just saying, "Oh, well, you didn't do that. And you didn't do this." No. This is not how I ever want to lead.

Mike Paton:

Hey everybody. This is Mike Paton with the EOS leader podcast. And I am super excited to be speaking with Brittany Franklin today, the founder and CEO of Sky High for Kids, a not for profit dedicated to ending pediatric cancer. Brittany grew up in Louisiana, and while I'm going to let her tell the story because she's so much better at it than me, let's just say she's overcome far more than her fair share of challenges. Through all sorts of adversities, she clung to her rallying cry, do things bigger than yourself. And man has she delivered. Sky High boasts an all female staff, none of whom are 45 years old yet, but they're all United by a passion for providing comfort, funding research, and saving the lives of those fighting pediatric cancer and other life threatening conditions. I'm certain you'll find learning more about Brittany and her company as exciting and informative and passion filled as I do. Brittany, welcome to the show.

Brittany Franklin:

Thank you so much, Paton. It is an honor to be here and an honor to share part of my journey with your listeners.

Mike Paton:

Awesome. Well, let's dig in right away. What I'd like you to do is just go back to those early years as a young girl. What were you experiencing? What did you go through that turned you into the person and the leader that you are today?

Brittany Franklin:

Well, I grew up on a very small rice and crawfish farm south of Lafayette, Louisiana. And my very early days was consumed by extreme work ethic, right out of the gates. Whether I was in the crawfish pond with my parents, picking up cages and culling, and then bringing the product to sell to the local restaurants, or I may have been in the barn before school even started feeding all of our animals. So I started with extreme work ethic and the word responsibility was ingrained in us at a very, very young age.

In fact, my dad crashed in a helicopter off shore. He worked seven and seven in the energy industry. And I was six years old at the time. We received a phone call. I'll never forget my mom's face and our drive to the hospital. Thankfully he and everyone survived, but they were badly injured. So my father was disabled at a mere 26 years old. He didn't graduate from high school and so all he knew was manual labor, which is why my work ethic is what it is today. I watched my dad, even after a helicopter crash, pull his family together and teach all of us what gaps we are responsible for filling to survive. And so that was the first big bout of adversity that our family went through. My mom didn't have an education either. So we became a full-time sheep farming family and rice and crawfish farming family right out of the gates.

Mike Paton:

Wow. This word responsibility you just used, did that come from your parents or did it come from inside?

Brittany Franklin:

I do believe that part of it does come from inside, but the experiences that you go through, I think, early in your life do push that word responsibility on the people who surround you. Right? So my parents had to literally assign tasks to myself and my brother, which consisted of feeding animals, mowing 10 acres of grass at 10 years old, folding laundry, vacuuming, and even cooking because everyone had to do their part. So I do believe that there's a part of you as a human that has some of that in you, almost like a natural born thing, but the people that you surround yourself with, which of course at that age were my parents, do have a huge part in instilling that in you as a human.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. I hear this a lot, the phrase necessity is the mother of invention. There's work to be done. When you're part of a family and you make your living and meet your family's needs by selling crawfish and selling rice and there's just work to be done. And a lot of times when you're in that situation and the rest of the world looks at that like hardship, you just look at it like I'm putting one foot in front of the other every day, because that's what we're supposed to do. Right?

Brittany Franklin:

Exactly. It was very normal for us. Although sheltered from the rest of the world, as I got older and experienced big cities and powerful people and powerful physicians, we had everything we needed. We had clothes, we had shelter, we had hot meals at night around the table. We prayed as a family. And so it was just very natural for us. It was what we had to do and we didn't know any different.

Mike Paton:

Got it. All right. So let's transition from the early stage family stuff to your first thoughts about what you were going to do when you were out on your own, making your own way in the world. Tell us about your entrepreneurial journey one step at a time.

Brittany Franklin:

So backing up just a tiny bit. When I was 16 years old, my mom asked me to participate in what's called the Cattle Festival pageant. In Louisiana parishes have festivals and attached to those festivals are pageants and they crown a queen. And that year, although I was not very interested in doing anything like that, I said, "Okay, mom, let's try this next adventure." And ended up being crowned the Deb Cattle Festival queen in 1999. And that really started my entrepreneur journey, if you will, because I didn't understand what was out there in the world and the opportunities that the world offered for me and my family to be involved as volunteers or as leaders. And right out of the gates you are responsible for helping any which way you could in your community.

So fast forwarding, I was able to participate in a fundraising event, which consisted of several teenage girls literally standing on the corner of the street with a bucket in hand, crown and sash on, and we were asking people that were going by in cars to make donations to support childhood cancer and the fight that St. Jude had started in 1962. And although I thought I understood what childhood cancer was, I really had no clue until I was able to visit. And with the fundraising that we accomplished, we

were able to head to Memphis, Tennessee as a small group, including my mom and grandmother, and truth be told, it was the first time I'd ever traveled north of I-10 in my life. So I also thought it was kind of a vacation, if you will.

And I was quickly surprised to see the amount of children of all ages fight for their life. And when we stepped into the Ronald McDonald House, which holds 53 families. It's a housing facility, home away from home, 53 families at a time to provide dinner and host a Mardi Gras carnival, my life literally changed. God had planted the seed for me then that I was put on this earth to help others. And although I didn't understand what that meant at the time, I just left feeling like this wasn't fair for kids younger, especially my age and older teens to be literally in a situation where they might not know if they're going to make it to the next day. And I just couldn't believe that this was going on and I wasn't exposed to that as a child. And so that created my passion and put the fire in my belly to do more.

Fast forwarding to college, I was the first person in my family to enroll in college. I was determined to graduate and become some big shot lawyer and moved to New York city. I think I saw it on TV and so I thought, "Yes, this is what I'm supposed to do." I have the gift of the gab and I love people and I love to negotiate. At the same time, I worked for a man named Stanley Lease, which I actually started when I was 16 years old at a restaurant called Edie's. And Stanley became the ultimate leader for me and almost like the ultimate idol/hero that I would follow and listen to every single thing that he taught us, whether it was faith or customer service, work ethic, responsibility, or to see the big picture in the room. That's what really shaped my spirit, if you will, in wanting more and wanting to become a leader, wanting to inspire people and lead the pack, whether it was serving biscuits or it was fundraising.

So it is senior year of college. I'm working two jobs and getting ready to take the LSAT when, crazy enough, Billy Menard, the same lady who took us to St. Jude all those years before, found me at the restaurant and said, "Brit, I have a goal this year to take our young queens back to Memphis but we are trying to fundraise \$10,000 to be able to put a plaque in the wall in honor of a child that did not win the battle. And I knew Billy was extremely passionate about the childhood cancer community, especially St. Jude. The most remarkable thing that she did was when you were crowned a queen, a lot of people have a very set perception of what that means for girls. And what it meant for Billy was to literally teach us servant leadership and to teach us what it means to give back.

And so I learned that, again, super early in my life and I held onto it, right? It became part of who I am today. And so I was crazy at the time in terms of a time commitment to studying and working. And I was on my own financially. My parents ended up in a pretty nasty divorce and lot of adversities, our house burned down. I mean, it was just there was a lot of additional things occurred in my early years. With that said, I decided to host a sporting clay tournament at a local sporting clay range. I shot there every Friday with customers that I served in the morning before I went to class. And I don't know what it was, but it's like an epiphany happened and God just said, "This is what you need to do to raise the \$10,000 for Ms. Billy Menard to put her plaque in the law at St. Jude."

And we found the original paper that I wrote in red ink. I wrote out a budget on the steps of the Dupre Library in Lafayette, Louisiana. We found that paper. It's in my office now. And that was truly the start of Sky High for Kids, which I didn't know I would be starting a full blown business. Although a nonprofit, it's a business and you run it like a business. And one thing led to another and before you know it, we had raised \$70,000. We were able to donate \$50,000 net profit to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the rest is history.

Mike Paton:

Awesome. What a great story. I want to go back to Stanley at Edie's because you mentioned that he was the first person that sort of infused in you an understanding of what leadership was. What is some of

the things, the specific things, you saw him do that gave you that feeling? This is what leadership is. If I'm ever a leader, this is what I want to emulate. Tell us some stories about Stanley.

Brittany Franklin:

Stanley had this very beautiful aura around him in terms of he started a restaurant, named it after his sister. And I don't think I ever, still to this day, have experienced a restaurant owner day in and day out physically cook, and then turn around, hit the floor in their apron and greet all of their customers. Stanley had this way of being able to juggle everything at one time and be able to execute with extreme efficiency. And what he did was he taught all of his girls how to do the same thing. And of course, some of us had it in terms of pure leadership, some of us didn't, but when he saw it in you, he put you under his wing and he took extra time to teach you what I like to call the big picture.

He would sit back and he'd make you look at the entire restaurant floor plan. You knew all the girls serving that day, you understood each person's section. You got in there, you filled up your honey bear, you refilled your ketchup, you swept your section, you cleaned your tables and you were ready to serve and meet and greet some of our community's finest people. And Stanley was just ... He had this ability to, again, just walk you through why it was so important, never compromise your core values, your ethics, especially your morals. And we were young girls, right? So that was very important to him to instill these things in us now, before we went on our own way in the world.

And so if you combine the customer service aspect, the work ethic aspect, again, core values, ethics, morals, and he was a man of faith. And again, I just never saw someone be able to mix dough in the back of the kitchen at 9:00 AM and then seat the first customer that walked into the restaurant. So that's when I knew I had met the ultimate leader at that stage in my life. And he still is today. If you go to Edie's today, Paton, he is serving you physically the biscuits.

Mike Paton:

That's awesome. So for the record, I'm hungry now. The story made me hungry and I can't wait to pour honey out of the honey bear onto my biscuit at Edie's. That is going to happen for sure.

Brittany Franklin:

Well, if you ever get to Lafayette, Louisiana, you cannot miss out on breakfast at Edie's restaurant.

Mike Paton:

Honestly, I'm starving right now. So here's what I heard about Stanley. Number one, he took the time to explain why. It's classic leadership behavior. So many managers are good at telling people what to do or how to do it, but very few take the time to explain why it's important and help you see the big picture. I also heard he didn't expect any more work ethic out anybody than he was willing to provide himself. So set very high standards for himself, which earned him the right to set high standards for all of you. And then the third thing I heard was that he genuinely cared about y'all as people, that ethics and morals and, and righteousness was really important to him and he let you all know that so that you felt comfortable staying in that place. And again, caring for people's super important. So I love the context, love the story. One more question about your past before we transition to talking about Sky High here in a minute. Tell me about Billy and what it was she taught you about servant leadership.

Brittany Franklin:

Billy, also from a very small town called Kaplan, Louisiana, managed and directed these small festival pageants. And to know that she cared so deeply about giving back to the community and that she would take the time to instill that in her girls was pretty remarkable. And today, still today, she is operating the same exact way and creating leaders from a very young age and impacting ... I mean, I'm talking girls from six years old to 21 in terms of what her vision is or her mission to impact the childhood cancer community. So you won this pageant, you received this crown and sash and, yes, you waved on stage and you rode in parades, but you had a responsibility to give back. And if you didn't stand on the street corner with your bucket or you didn't participate in the community aspect of things, well, you weren't going to Memphis. You weren't getting that ticket to be able to be a part of that unforgettable experience.

And so it was almost a reward, if you will, which I think is very smart in terms of how she laid out that opportunity for so many young girls. We wanted to work harder so we could go to Memphis, Tennessee, and go to St. Jude. Again, not understanding truly what that meant until we arrived there and we were surrounded by so many families that were fighting for their child's life. But yeah, that's what she did. She wanted us to understand that if we worked hard and we helped others, that there was a special place for us in the world. And I just really give her a ton of credit for teaching me that and my mom a ton of credit for making me try something that was very much out of my comfort zone at the time.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Well, you mentioned earlier that everybody has a perception of what a beauty queen is. And so I'm putting all these images together. So a tomboy from a crawfish farm who can shoot sporting clays probably as good as anybody in your town, standing on the street corner with a sash collecting money. That is a world class view of what a beauty queen really is because it is a lot of responsibility and you are at a very young age taking on a leadership role in many ways before you're really prepared to understand what that means. And then you did exactly the same thing as you did as a young girl, which was put one foot in front of the other until it all became clear to you. So it's a great story and I really appreciate you sharing it.

Brittany Franklin:

Thank you.

Mike Paton:

Tell us a little bit about Sky High. Walk us from the fundraiser with a goal of \$10,000 that actually generated \$70,000 in donations. And so what I've learned about you is you need to set your goals a little higher. And then how did that turn into the venture that you're running today?

Brittany Franklin:

Well, Paton, we kicked off this sporting clay tournament. It was August of 2007. And the women that I worked with at Edie's all jumped on board to help me because, before I could blink, Stanley, of course, was so proud of what we were going to do he allowed us to put out the flyers all over the restaurant and ask our customers to donate and participate. And that's really how things rapidly grew in terms of that first year. I didn't realize I was serving owners of major oil and gas companies. When they start writing their corporate checks and we're depositing them, I'm like, "Wait. Oh, oh, they own the company. This is amazing." But how cool for these people to believe in what a group of young girls was trying to accomplish.

And so we hosted the first tournament, 300 people participated. And at that very moment, literally two weeks later, remember this is my final semester of college, I'm getting ready to take the LSAT and move on. I started to receive phone calls from some of the owners of the companies that participated terms of me going to work for them. Wait time out. I'm not interested in joining the oil and gas industry. My dad worked in oil and gas and crashed in a helicopter. I'm this is not what I'm doing because, Paton, you got to still remember, even though I was in college and surrounded by some amazing people, I still didn't understand what the world had to offer. I didn't understand that engineering was a degree in college. I had no idea. I thought you had to be a teacher, a doctor, or a lawyer, a veterinarian, literally.

So I ended up going on several job interviews, drove across I-10 to Houston, Texas, came back home and I have job offers [inaudible 00:21:46]. And I showed this to Crystal and Holly and some of the girls that helped me start Sky High were a little older than me and they all taught me different things that I still cherish today. And they're still all very involved in our mission and our life's work. And Crystal looked at me and said, we call each other chicken, so she said, "Chicken, you have to take this job offer. Law school will always be there, but you have to take this job offer because there's just really two reasons. What you started must continue. And this is an opportunity that you may never get again."

And so I prayed about it for two weeks. At the same time, we were headed to Memphis, Tennessee, to donate our proceeds. And at that very moment of handing the check over to St. Jude, a little boy named Bryce Norwood came up to the big St. Jude statue in a red wagon with his parents. And they were from Mansfield, Louisiana. Just so happened to be family of one of our founding board members. And he said, "Hi. What are y'all doing here today?" And he was just the cutest, most bubbly, big personality kid. And we were like, "Well, we're donating money to St. Jude. What are you doing today?" And he said, "Well, I have to do chemo this afternoon, but it's sure nice to meet you girls." I mean, it was like, who is this kid?

And very quickly we became friends with Bryce and his entire family, not knowing, Paton, that he was terminally ill. Soon learned that. And within a two week span, we were able to fulfill this family's last adventure weekend before he earned his angel wings at a ranch in Texas. His dad's dream was to hunt whitetail deer with his son before he passed away. They were passionate outdoorsmen and we made that happen for the family. And I got really close to Bryce. I still cannot believe that God put that whole situation or allowed me to be so involved intimately with a family that I didn't know three months prior, but was asking me to be a part of their son's life at the very, very end. And that was the moment that I knew God had been giving me all these signs since I'm a young girl as the cattle festival queen, that this is what I was put on earth to do. It was to help people. It was to lead. It was to inspire. And it was to impact the childhood cancer community in a very big way.

And so I took the job offer in Houston, Texas, and started my career in oil and gas and quit my senior semester of school. Didn't graduate, didn't go to law school, and launched an official 501C3 nonprofit called Sky High for Kids. And the very next year in 2008, we weren't only hosting the tournament in Lafayette, we were also hosting a tournament in Houston, Texas. And then in 2013, we were in San Antonio; and then in 2017, we were in west Texas. Next year we're going to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and we've donated over \$17 million to impact not only St. Jude's mission, but now Texas Children's Cancer center right here in my backyard, which is one of the largest childhood cancer facilities in the country.

And so from a sporting clay tournament with the girls that I serve biscuits with in college to meeting a little boy named Bryce Norwood, who became my personal legacy, who lost his life at six years old on Valentine's Day, his birthday, he was called to Jesus, to launch a career in oil and gas, which ended up being rather successful in terms of corporate sales, which I just retired from oil and gas

literally in June of this year to take on my life's work full time and take us to the next level, to being able to literally save hundreds of thousands of lives. I still don't even believe that it's true sometimes.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. What a lovely story. Thanks for sharing that. Along your journey, you may have also seen people who weren't inspirational and weren't effective as leaders and managers. Does anything stick out in your mind about what you don't want to do when you're rallying your troops?

Brittany Franklin:

Yes. And I'm still learning how to be a better leader and be a human being every day. I'm not perfect. My team thinks I can be rather abrasive at times, very direct. I'm a driver, I'm expressive, and I just want to get things done and get done now.

Mike Paton:

And you can shoot. So we have to take this very seriously.

Brittany Franklin:

Yes. I'm still an avid waterfowler today and love to shoot sporting clays.

Mike Paton:

I was going to say, my guess is you're a little competitive, just a ...

Brittany Franklin:

A little competitive. I don't believe everybody gets the trophy here.

Mike Paton:

I get it.

Brittany Franklin:

But I did. So you got to remember, I was taught from a young age that the leader led by example, they got their hands dirty. My dad did it. My mom even did it. Stanley Lease, did it. Crystal did it. And so when I was in my oil and gas career, when I reported to certain people, I learned very quickly the leader I would never want to become and that was someone that took all the glory and didn't do any of the work, did not lead by core values and moral values, right? I've seen a lot working in a male-dominant industry as a female. And lastly, someone that does doesn't even know their products or services that their team is responsible for selling. So I knew that I wanted to always be knowledgeable enough to be dangerous in anything that I was doing, right?

I'm not going to be a medical expert in oncology, but I'm going to know enough of the statistics to be able to talk the talk and walk the walk. And then I, right now, today, we are getting ready to host a 500 person event on Sunday. And it is very much quote, unquote, not my job to be assisting in event logistics at this stage in the game. But I will be here until my director of events tells me she can go home and go to sleep tonight and get some rest, right? We are an all hands on deck operation here. And I think if the leader is willing to get their hands dirty at any point in their career, no matter what your title is, no matter what powerful people, you just went to dinner with last night, if you can't get up the next

day and be there to support your team and to make sure that whatever balls are being dropped, how can we find the solutions and let's get it done versus sitting back and just saying, "Oh, well, you didn't do that and you didn't do this." No, I learned that about 25, 26 years old working for a certain individual that I just thought, wow, this is definitely not how I ever want to lead.

Mike Paton:

Good for you. That said, you mentioned you're not perfect. Have you ever been stuck or frustrated or wish you had a chance to do something over again as a leader because you know you could have done it different or better?

Brittany Franklin:

Yes. I probably have too many examples for this podcast today, but the way that I grew up, again, was education wasn't in the forefront. It was really a grind. It was grit. It was survival mode. It was get stuff done or you might not be able to put food a table. And so I did develop a very strong personality in terms of I feel that everyone should be on my level of expectations 24/7. And sometimes that doesn't work 24/7, right? I need to understand that it's okay that I need to sit back, I need to soak in the information that I'm given, and instead of reacting immediately and aggressively or abrasively, I need to take in what my team is saying, account for their thoughts account, for their comments, and then gracefully return my feedback.

That is still something I'm learning today. I think that Matt has been a phenomenal leader and coach for me in terms of learning, not to react immediately. Again, whether it's making very impulsive decisions. I hired a marketing company five years ago that I didn't properly vet and I didn't ask my board for their thoughts or opinions. I just thought, "Well, I have the power and they sound great, and they're going to do all these wonderful things, signed a \$50,000 contract." And before you know it, they're not delivering whatsoever and I'm having to fire them and everybody's looking at me and I'm ... So mistake there. And that was just not including my other leaders to help me make those decisions. Being a little bit impulsive and, again, reactive. I've hired a couple of people in my day that I should have taken more time, again, properly vet or understand what their core values really are, that didn't work out. Right? I've had to fire people, lay people off. And so, yes, there's been plenty of mistakes. Going to be more to come, but I don't know what it is about me or whether it's the coaching or my mentors, mistakes or failures for me become a bigger challenge that I just want to tackle. I'm like, "Okay, I messed up."

Mike Paton:

It's the way you learn.

Brittany Franklin:

Yeah. I messed up-

Mike Paton:

I mean, if you never make a mistake, you're never going to learn anything.

Brittany Franklin:

Right. I messed one up-

Mike Paton:

And none of us know it. Right?

Brittany Franklin:

No.

Mike Paton:

None of us know it all.

Brittany Franklin:

No.

Mike Paton:

What I hear you talking about, Brit, is the transition that all entrepreneurs who found something they're passionate about have to go through, and that is from succeeding via rugged individualism and passion alone, to succeeding through other people. And that is not a straight line journey. There's lots of zigs and zags. You're just describing very articulately and very passionately the journey we're all on because when you have four of you, it's possible to lead effectively through rugged individualism. When you have 40 of you or 400 of you or 4,000 of you all managing events all over the country to raise money for pediatric cancer research, you have to trust people to do their own deal and make their own mistakes and learn on their journey. And that is really hard for anybody like you and me who might have grown up slightly perfectionistic, just a little bit.

Brittany Franklin:

Very much so. I mean, the girls will tell me, I'm not allowed now to enter the event venue until showtime, because I'll get in there at noon and be like, "Can you move this? I don't like that."

Mike Paton:

You'll be picking everything apart. Yeah.

Brittany Franklin:

And listen, I've been called a control freak. I've been called ... Listen, my grandma's the same way. My dad was the same way. Yes. You have this vision and you have this passion and you think you know it, and that's one of the biggest things I've learned through our EOS coaching and our EOS implementation is empowering other people, trusting other people to be able to take something to the next level and execute it and it's not always going to be the way you would do it. And that's okay.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. There's a great story-

Brittany Franklin:

And that's okay.

Mike Paton:

There's a great old story. This is probably a 50 year old story about the CEO. The leader reporting to him walks into the office and says, "I'm turning in my resignation letter. I made a terrible mistake. It cost the company a million dollars. And so I'm respectfully resigning." And the CEO said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute." He ripped the letter up. And he said, "You think I'm going to spend a million dollars to train you for your next gig? No chance. It's a million dollar mistake. There better be a million dollars worth of learning in that." And I think we just need to remember that as leaders, although quite frankly, I certainly understand that a million might be a little more than any of us are willing to tolerate, but the point is those mistakes are really powerful.

Brittany Franklin:

They are.

Mike Paton:

Tell us a little bit about your team and where you're going from here with Sky High. What's your five, 10 year target look like?

Brittany Franklin:

So we have a 10 year goal to donate \$60 million to impact major around the country. And to kick that off in 2018, we signed two very large commitments, one to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital to sponsor the entire second floor of the ARC Center, which is now the largest research laboratory in the country at 625,000 square feet. That is \$20 million commitment. We became in the top 20 donors in history of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital with this pledge commitment. This will be the home for neuro developmental research. This is the hard stuff, Paton, brain cancer, bone cancer, solid tumors, where the survival rates are not so good. And for us, if our vision is to end childhood cancer, what do we have to invest in to get one step closer of making that a reality? Right?

And that's what EOS really helped us do is, our vision became extremely clear. Our mission became clear. Our core values became very clear. And so that \$20 million pledge, we have a total of 13 years to complete that commitment. We're really excited about it. In fact, the research ARC opens at the end of 2021. So even through the pandemic, they were able to continue construction. And this is going to change the game in terms of research for kids all over the world. That's what's so beautiful about St. Jude and every other pediatric cancer research center. They don't only keep it to themselves. Why would they do that? They collaborate and they share it with facilities around the world so they can impact more kids. In addition, \$20 million to Texas Children's Cancer Center to open the first immunotherapy center in the country for pediatrics. And that is open and operating today.

Last year, we were able to impact 650 families. There are 22 hemonc and oncology rooms and 10 new bone marrow transplant units that were needed. I mean, extremely needed. Paton, they didn't have enough room. They didn't have enough room to treat children. And so in addition, we are giving to Global Hope, which is an unbelievable program that Texas Children's Cancer Center kicked off about five or six years ago, where they went into Sub-Saharan Africa to combat pediatric cancer. I mean, 100,000 kids are diagnosed every year in Sub-Saharan Africa and, Paton, 90,000 kids are dying. The survival is 10%. The survival rate in the United States is nearly 80%. Okay? It's still not good enough. One in five kids do not survive, but we thought it as a board and as an organization that it was our moral duty to, again, look at the vision. We want to end pediatric cancer. That doesn't mean here in Texas. That doesn't mean only in Louisiana. It means globally. No parents should have to ever bury their child, ever, and no child should ever have to go through a grueling disease as cancer.

So our total pledge commitments right now are \$40 million. We're one of the smallest, youngest, and I guess we're called go big or go home nonprofits in the country that is pledging these types of dollars to impact the childhood cancer community.

Mike Paton:

And now your job, you and your staff, is to figure out how to fulfill those commitments and make more.

Brittany Franklin:

Yes, exactly. And then, it's so amazing at our Q3 board meeting last night and I'm mapping out already what 2022 looks like, our marketing communications division is going to concentrate on monthly reoccurring donations, on peer to peer fundraising and getting more schools and salons and other companies involved. Then we have our events division, which Grace Terrio is now managing five regions and roughly five to six million dollars in revenue. And these events are big, Paton. They're a banquet the night before with a whole production, a sporting clay tournament the next day. Sometimes we have dual golf tournaments on the same day. And so the logistics are a complete nightmare, to be honest. Our events division is mapped out across five regions. And then we're building for the first time, a true development team, which I like to call outside sales.

For the past 15 years we've had phenomenal support by regional event volunteers and our board and other people. But the reality is I'm kind of that outside salesperson that speaks to the mission, goes and gives presentations, and is very passionate about the work that we're doing. And I'm just running out of time and can't touch all of the people and inspire all of the companies to get on board. So I need some more help. So we're going to build a development division starting Q1 of next year. And so we will work on our \$40 million pledge commitments. We'll start working on what the next big thing is to, again, impact the vision. We're going to grow our team. We're going to develop our team. We're going to educate our team. We're going to invest in them. We're going to try our best to retain our top talent. And we're going to make bold, somewhat fearless moves in terms of leading through the nonprofit world in terms of childhood cancer.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. It's funny that you said that. What I wonder is have you noticed a difference between leadership in the nonprofit world and leadership in the for-profit world? And if so, what is it?

Brittany Franklin:

Wow, what a great question. I joined the Entrepreneurship Organization of Houston three or four years ago as the very first founder of a nonprofit in history. In fact, I had to be vetted even longer because the board wasn't sure if I was truly deemed as an entrepreneur because I don't own my company. Right? So I had a lot to say about that. And for the first time ever, I will admit, I never viewed myself as an entrepreneur, Paton. I was a founder and I was passionate about doing things bigger than myself, but I didn't think I was an entrepreneur. And then I got involved in EO, here came EOS and started surrounding myself around all these great leaders and everybody started looking at me and they're like, "Brittany, you're an entrepreneur. You have all these ideas, you want to start this, you want to do that, and you work really hard at it."

In the for-profit world, listen, no one is discounted in a leadership position. It is the hardest thing to do in your lifetime, whether you're managing people, you're creating the vision, you're living out the core values and you are efficiently executing cash flow, et cetera. But in the for profit world, it is

for things that most of the time ... How can I say this tastefully? May or may not save lives or make a huge impact in moving social things across the line.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. Sometimes that's true-

Brittany Franklin:

But it's kind of like a grind for money, a grind for money, a grind for money, a grind for power, grind for this, or a title. Nonprofit is like, "Hey, we're here to do the really hard stuff. Okay? Like world peace, homeless population, cure cancer. We get paid less to work harder. And sometimes the public perception is that we're just doing these things because it feels good." Does that make sense?

Mike Paton:

Yes.

Brittany Franklin:

Did I answer that?

Mike Paton:

Yeah, yeah. And yet what I've seen having worked with a number of not for profit companies implementing EOS is in order to be successful, you need to apply the same principles. No margin, no mission. Right? If you aren't bringing in more funding than you expend, you're going to go out of business just the way a for profit company would.

Brittany Franklin:

See you're the expert here, Paton. You said that perfectly.

Mike Paton:

The rules are the same, right? And in defense of my for profit leadership teams, what I'll say is often they are also passionate about having some kind of positive impact on the world. But it is true that that isn't the reason they're doing it most of the time. Right? And for the record, I can't tell you, I would bet if we went back and listened to every guest on this show, 85% or more of them say at one point during the interview or not, "I never considered myself an entrepreneur until one day I woke up and I was an entrepreneur." So you are not alone in that either for what it's worth.

Brittany Franklin:

I know. I'll never forget, I was like, "I don't even know how to spell that word." Come on. Help me out here. People.

Mike Paton:

My favorite is a client who said, "I don't know, I was fixing somebody's ..." He owns a plumbing and HVAC contracting firm. He goes, All I know is one day I was working on somebody in the neighborhood's sink and the next day I was signing 40 paychecks. If that's an entrepreneur, I guess I'm an entrepreneur."

Brittany Franklin:

Right? Yeah. I will go back though. You nailed it on the head. Before EOS, we were just doing what we had to do when we had to do it, following an SOP and putting out fires all the time. Implementing EOS truly opened up my eyes to understand exactly what you said. We are running a business, just like a for profit company. Period. End of story. We read PNLs, just like you read PNLs.

Mike Paton:

You're competing for the same share of wallet that could go to any other noble cause. And it's the similarities, in my opinion, vastly outweigh the differences. All right, one last question for you before I close with some vital information for our listeners who want to get to know you a little bit more. This question is if you could go and give yourself one piece of advice when you were just starting out on your leadership journey however accidental it feels to you, what's the one piece of advice you think that young leader needed to hear and share it with our listeners today, please?

Brittany Franklin:

Always follow your gut. I, again, didn't grow up surrounded by a ton of powerful, wealthy people. I didn't grow up with education in the forefront. And a lot of times, Paton, and still today, I followed my gut, my instinct, whether it's hiring or making the decision to host an event or open a new region or whatever it may be. I have to say that following my gut has truly been 99.9% of the reason of my success, because I didn't, especially, you're saying in the early days, I didn't have a ton of these mentors that I have today. I didn't have the board I have today. Didn't have Matt Abrams. Right? But to follow my gut and learn from my mistakes and get back up the next day and have that attitude. No matter what, you can't give up.

Mike Paton:

Yeah. I love it.

Brittany Franklin:

So that's my piece of advice.

Mike Paton:

Yeah, really good stuff. And for the record, my gut is still taking me to Edie's as soon as I can get there. All right. Where can the listener who wants to learn more about you and Sky High go to find that information most efficiently?

Brittany Franklin:

SkyHighForKids.org. Our website has a plethora of information. Whether you want to volunteer, make blankets that are directly going to the hospital for kids, or especially participate in one of our amazing fundraising events across the Gulf Coast. Everything is at SkyHighForKids.org. That's S-K-Y-H-I-G-H-F-O-R-K-I-D-S.org.

Mike Paton:

Perfect. Thank you so much. I'll make sure all it's in the show notes as well and make it as easy as possible for people to connect with you. Once again, Brittany, I just want to say, thank you. It's been great getting to know you. This conversation was amazing. And as all our listeners know that EOS leader podcast is about reminding us all that we're in this together. We're all just trying to be the best leader

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we can be every day. And I think what you shared will help all of us do that better tomorrow. Thanks so much.

Brittany Franklin:

Thank you, Paton. It's been an honor.

Mike Paton:

If you got value from today's episode, do me a favor, share the episode with a friend. If you know someone who would benefit from the conversation I had today, make sure to share it with them.